Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations
Settlement Agreement

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Thank you Tewanee, chiefs, hereditary chiefs, councillors, and Elders — Elders that are here and Elders that are perhaps watching from elsewhere, their work being completed.

It's a special day. How do you feel? Do you feel good? I feel good.

Chief Robert Sam of the Songhees and Chief Andy Thomas of the Esquimalt people. Elmer George – thank you so much for your prayer. To the dancers, drummers and young people here today – thank you all.

What's your name? Hello Sandra. How are you? Thanks for coming.

It's remarkable when we think of what is taking place here today. Just now I was standing with my friend Jim Prentice, Federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Minister Prentice, welcome to British Columbia and to these buildings.

And just a few moments ago, something very special happened when we met out in front of the building. There was a moment when Chief Sam made the observation about who was greeting whom.

And I thought, as the procession was actually taking place, that the more significant point must be that people are coming together to resolve something that has gone unresolved for 150 years. That's really the point.

And we, all in our own very special way, are here to witness it. And I don't want to leave Greg out of the proceedings. Nice to see you here as well, Greg.

We hear those words "new relationship." For me, it is something that is truly magical when we see that new relationship working – when we see progress being made.

I want to thank both chiefs and acknowledge that we are on traditional territories.

This settlement agreement has occurred because both the Songhees and Esquimalt people have pursued a claim that emanated from a long period of time. I don't think even Deputy Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Lorne Brownsey was alive in 1850.

But the claim stayed alive because Elders, chiefs and councilors made the decision to pursue the claim. That decision has been carried forward by existing chiefs and councillors.

The claim, as set out in those legal documents that form the basis for structuring these issues, is fascinating because it describes circumstances in which there was, at best, great confusion. But the claim talks about the lands upon which these buildings are situated. And it left great doubt.

And today, as part of that exercise in respectful reconciliation, we collectively have decided to address that doubt and find a way to take some steps together.

And I think the chiefs would be the first to want me to point out that after we initial these documents in a few moments, then the work for many of you here today from the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations will begin. In this building constructed around principles of democracy and democratic participation, you will be asked by your chiefs and councillors to make a decision about the work that has been undertaken.

That's a great thing. It's a great thing when we can gather together and have enough faith and respect in one another to initiate that process of reconciliation.

I would like to thank all of the people who have contributed to making this day possible – contributed to the documents around which these proceedings are built. The documents are important. The documents give legal structure in ways that are necessary. But the documents are not more important, ladies and gentlemen, than the feeling we carry in our hearts that has made this event possible in the first place. The documents are not more important than the realization, as we say in this new relationship, that we are all here to stay. Our challenge is find ways to help one another to make our stay as positive an experience as possible for us, for our people, for our families.

Minister Prentice, in the short time that I have had my job, I have come to know that there is no greater advocate for the development, evolution, and building of that strong foundation of trust, that new relationship – than you.

It is a tribute to the leadership that Minister Prentice has brought to his task that we are able to be here today. He is able, with confidence, to say to his colleagues, his officials, and the people that he works with in the federal parliament, that this is the right thing to do. And we are grateful that he has lent the weight of his presence here today to add to the solemnity of this occasion.

And to our chiefs, the Songhees and the Esquimalt people – leadership is a remarkably difficult thing at times. It takes vision. It takes courage. It takes a willingness to take a step forward and say, "I believe this is the right thing to do, and I am prepared to tell others that it is the right thing to do."
In a variety of ways — in ways of late not entirely connected with these documents — you have shown an incredible ability and willingness to demonstrate that kind of leadership on behalf of your peoples. I say, thank you, and I applaud you for that.

And, finally, to all of you who have taken the time today to demonstrate the importance you attach to these proceedings – thank you. I know there are members of the B.C. Legislature here today. I thank them for being here as well — my colleagues from the chamber just on the other side of that wall. Thank you to all of you.

"Historic" is an often over-used term. In this building, on this day, I cannot think of a more appropriate word to describe our presence here today. What is taking place is truly historic.

Thank you very, very much.